

Dear Friends,

Last week I had the pleasure of delivering some exciting news to five outstanding public school teachers. It was notification day for the 2008-09 finalists in South Carolina's Teacher of the Year Program.

- Jenna Hallman teaches science at Calhoun Academy for the Arts in Anderson School District 5;
- Josie Stratton teaches English at Mayo High School for Math, Science and Technology in Darlington County;
- Renee Sanders teaches biology at Johnsonville High School in Florence School District 5;
- Laura Jean Reed teaches music at Stone Academy of Communications Arts in Greenville; and
- Rona Neely teaches math at Bell Street Middle School in Laurens School District 56.

Although they work in different areas of the state, these educators have several things in common. All National Board–certified, they are mentors for new teachers, workshop presenters, successful grant writers, and award winners. In addition, they are community volunteers. Habitat for Humanity, the American Cancer Society, Meals on Wheels, Ronald McDonald House, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, and churches are just a few of the organizations that benefit from their time and efforts. But foremost, these teachers empower young people. They model the traits that they would like to see in their students, developing environments that are positive and productive – places where students feel safe and supported in developing, learning, and expressing ideas.

Jenna, Josie, Renee, Laura, and Rona will travel to Columbia March 13 for personal interviews with a seven-member state Selection Committee. They are vying to represent more than 50,000 South Carolina teachers in the National Teacher of the Year Program.

South Carolina's new Teacher of the Year will receive a \$25,000 cash award, a Dell laptop computer, and a BMW Z-4 roadster (manufactured at BMW's South Carolina plant) to use for a year. The four remaining finalists, or Honor Roll teachers, will receive \$10,000 each. Local district teachers of the year receive \$1,000 each.

All of these teachers will be honored at the annual Teacher of the Year Banquet April 25 in Columbia. This evening is made possible by the generosity of state and national business sponsors.

As a former teacher, I recognize the important role that teachers play in student success. That's why teacher quality has been a priority since I became State Superintendent of Education just over 13 months ago. I believe that we must elevate and reinvigorate the teaching profession. My reform plan also focuses on increasing public school choice, accelerating innovation, refining accountability for maximum results with minimum

testing, and providing more fair and equitable funding for schools. By continuing to work hard, we can create schools that are second to none.

I applaud these teachers and the thousands of others who everyday on the frontlines of public education in South Carolina make a difference. Thank you all for everything that you do.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education